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SUBJECT: RABBANI DISTRUSTS KARZAI ON RECONCILIATION,  
MILITIAS

Classified By: Ambassador William Wood for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (C/NF) SUMMARY. On Nov. 18, Former President Burhanuddin Rabbani told the Ambassador he distrusted President Karzai's reconciliation talks with the Taliban and proposals to arm tribal militias. Rabbani said many non-Pashtuns suspect Karzai is pursuing a strategy that sets Pashtuns against the country's other ethnicities. The Ambassador emphasized that the US was not involved in the reconciliation talks held last month in Saudi Arabia and would proceed carefully with discussions on alternatives to strengthen local security. The Ambassador also called for a quick consensus on the timing of next year's presidential election.

Rabbani's Suggestions for the New US Administration

¶2. (C/NF) Prof. Rabbani offered three suggestions for the new administration: (1) to plan its Afghan policy toward all Afghans, and not favor Pashtuns; (2) to promote reconciliation with the Taliban only from a position of strength and require those seeking to reconcile to break off relations with al Qaeda and Pakistan-based sources of support; and (3) to tread carefully with proposals to use armed militias (arbakai) to provide local security. Rabbani also appealed for more assistance for his northeastern province.

Skeptical of Reconciliation

¶3. (C/NF) Rabbani did not approve of the government's reconciliation effort, with only Pashtuns close to the Karzai family representing the government. Rabbani said the Taliban still have much guilt to account for, and any move to negotiate with their leaders now would be a sign of weakness. Rabbani criticized the use of Qayum Karzai, the president's brother, as one of the chief interlocutors in the Saudi negotiations. He said any reconciliation process should be a national initiative and involve Afghans from all major groups. Rabbani thought more should be done to divide Taliban wishing to rejoin the government from those Taliban receiving support from al Qaeda or groups inside Pakistan before meeting them at the negotiating table.

¶4. (C/NF) The Ambassador replied that reconciliation was a difficult issue and agreed that the Afghan government should only negotiate from a position of strength. He told Rabbani the US urged a patient, careful approach and recognized that the goal of any negotiation should be to convince the Taliban to accept the Constitution, and not to compromise the Constitution for the Taliban's purposes. He also said the US had no role in the Saudi talks.

Concern Over Local Militias

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15. (C/NF) Rabbani expressed concern that proposals to arm militias, or arbakai, to assist with local security, further divided Pashtuns from other ethnic groups. Many non-Pashtuns suspected armed Pashtun militias would antagonize other ethnic groups and re-ignite the inter-ethnic clashes of the pre-Taliban civil war in the 1990s. Rabbani hoped US strategic planners recognized the difference between Iraq, where the central government might have had success cooperating with local militias, and Afghanistan. If planners were not careful, arbakai could become Taliban reserve forces.

16. (C/NF) The Ambassador shared some of Rabbani's concerns, but that many security planners were looking to take advantage of the historical strength of Afghanistan's local communities and promote strategic plans to help tribes become self-reliant. He emphasized the US was not considering providing arms to tribes and had no desire to provide them with the capacity to leave their own valleys and attack other groups.

#### Elections

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17. (C/NF) Rabbani, the most prominent leader in the opposition United Front coalition, said the party plans to contest next year's presidential election, but has not yet identified a candidate. Absent an obvious choice for an endorsement, Rabbani said the UF is focusing on building national unity and seeking a strategy that will win support

KABUL 00003031 002 OF 002

beyond its Tajik base. Rabbani was encouraged by the results of the US election and hoped the new administration would see it has a partner in the UF. Rabbani did not offer a specific opinion on constitutional questions surrounding the election date, but criticized Karzai for not better involving other political leaders in the build up to voter registration.

18. (C/NF) The Ambassador told Rabbani a free, fair, open, and secure election was a US priority, and urged political leaders to reach a consensus on the date of the election soon. If the election occurs before the fall, the government and the international community will need to react quickly to adjust their planning and support. Any delay in reaching a consensus could harm the success of the election, he said.

#### General Distrust of Karzai

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19. (C/NF) Rabbani's views reflect those of many non-Pashtuns, who view Karzai as increasingly hostile. Non-Pashtuns point to reconciliation with the Taliban and the potential use of militias in security strategies and assume the worst -- that such efforts will lead to Pashtun subjugation of ethnic minorities. Rabbani's opinions carry more weight than most, but are far from unique. Many Afghans are growing concerned with what they see is a Pashtun monopoly on the major security issues. Rabbani and others warn that non-Pashtun exclusion from security issues could push many ethnic groups to re-arm or reject the authority of the central government. Although perceptions of the "Pashtunization" of the government outstrip reality, Karzai would be wise to work more closely with the other ethnic groups.

WOOD